

HIGH- POTENTIAL POSTURE:

How Body Language Changes Everything

It takes approximately eleven one-hundredths of a second to recognize a face. When you walk into an interview for the first time, that's about how long it takes for the interviewer to make an assessment of you. There are tons of articles about optimizing sales, productivity, and your online presence, but what about optimizing yourself? I'm not talking about spiritually, but superficially—literally nothing below the skin. Not only will improving your posture improve how people immediately perceive you, but you will begin to feel what you are presenting.

How are you sitting while you're reading this right now? Are your legs or ankles crossed? Maybe your left hand is touching the side of your nose as you recline in your armchair, or lean on the desk in front of your computer. In the TED Talk, "How Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are," Amy Cuddy reveals how we can change other people's perceptions, and even our own body chemistry, simply by changing body positions.

A study by Alex Todorov at Princeton has proved that looking at pictures of political candidates' faces for 100 milliseconds predict 70 percent of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial race outcomes. The subjects had no idea who the candidates were, nor of their political standings;



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all they knew was if the candidate looked pleasant or trustworthy.

When we are feeling confident and powerful, we spread out—make ourselves big. Recall any victory of a sports player. What did they do? They probably threw their arms up in the air, right? Now, what do we do when we feel powerless? We do the exact opposite. We close up, and make ourselves small. This will be perceived as unconfident—if you look weak, people will think you're weak, and vice versa. Nobody wants to interact with a feeble person (this applies to aspects outside of the workplace, too, like making friends and finding dates).

Nonverbals effect how people see each other, but Cuddy elaborated in her TED Talk upon a hypothesis she and her colleague, Dana Carney, wanted to try: does changing our body language effect the way we see ourselves? Cuddy and Carney tried an experiment to answer this question. Turns out, it does. Cuddy said, "We smile when we feel happy, but also, when we're forced to smile by holding a pen in our teeth... When it comes to power, it goes both ways... when you pretend to be powerful, you are more likely to actually feel powerful."

In the experiment, Cuddy brought people into a lab and told the people to adopt either high-power or low-power poses for two minutes. After two minutes had passed, the subjects were told to gamble, and guess what happened: the ones who assumed high-power poses were much more confident—i.e. took more risks—in games of chance. How did this affect physiological (hormonal) conditions? Cuddy said, "Here's what we find on testosterone: From their baseline when they come in, high-power people experience about a 20 percent increase, and low-power people experience about a 10 percent decrease. Here's what you get on cortisol: High-power people experience about a 25 percent decrease, and the low-power people experience about a 15 percent increase. So two minutes [of high- or low-power posing] lead to these hormonal changes that configure your brain to basically be either assertive, confident, and comfortable, or really stress-reactive, and... feeling sort of shut down... so it seems that our nonverbals do govern how we think and feel about ourselves." Applying this research to your everyday life will not only improve your next interview, but subsequently the rest of your work and personal life.

So give it a try! Spend a couple minutes standing or sitting in a high-power pose. See if it affects the way you feel about yourself, and if it changes your overall outlook.